



Essentiality Of Partition In A Train To Pakistan By Khushwant Singh

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DOI Number: 10.48047/nq.2022.20.20.NQ109278

Neuroquantology 2022; 20 (20):2867-2871

The period of Indian political history that utters the freedom of India after 250 years of British rule and the time immediately after that which witnessed the Partition of India are not detached with each other, but are observed in same frame. There is no postcolonial writer in India who can possibly ignore the impact of Partition on the life of the common people and the countrywide tumult created for years to come such that the tremors can be experienced even today in the contemporary life and the political concerns of both the nations- India and Pakistan. Undoubtedly it was a turning point in the history of both the nations which served as a compelling literary theme for the post-colonial writers to include in their works.

Even though when the diversity of the tone is maintained, the focus, style and treatment of the subject may vary in perspective, the overall effect of the partition has deeply stirred the heart of the writers. Works like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* are some of the novels reflecting the impact of partition and deciphering the tears of the common people and their miseries.

According to playwright Ahsan, the Indian subcontinent is composed of two civilizations Indus and Indic, out of which Indus has been one of the larger, independent and political economic zone for the past centuries. There is a community of historians who blamed the colonial power for the partition and stated that

it was their strategy to divide and tear the two communities apart. According to them, the division of the continent was caused by the British's 'divide and rule' policy. According to notable historians, A K Banerjee, Sumit Sarkars, and Bipan Chandra, the Britishers struck a political strategy that was anticipated since the division of Bengal in 1905.

In the context of partition there have been numerous works composed by Indian writers and amongst these, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) maintains an iconic status as it portrays a realistic image of human impact in Partition's tragedy. It was the first novel ever written on the theme of Partition. Singh was a trained lawyer who practiced in Lahore High Court at that time, but the trauma of Partition was a real incident in the unfortunate chapter of his life that took him away from his people and landed him like thousands of other Sikhs who suffered miseries at that time. According to Salman Rushdie, "it is the 'only goodbook on the theme of partition'", while it was acknowledged by Amitav Ghosh as a 'classic'.

The term 'Train' in the novel has a symbolic significance with reference to Partition as the train happens to present one of the most enduring images on the subcontinent. It was a train that was overloaded with dead bodies and stained with their blood, the bodies were stuck between the buffers, clung on the windows, crowded on the roof but all dead and no one alive. The imagery of train is not only employed by Khushwant Singh but many other

2867

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Relevant Conflicts Of Interest/Financial Disclosures: The Authors Declare That The Research Was Conducted In The Absence Of Any Commercial Or Financial Relationships That Could Be Construed As A Potential conflict of interest.



authors like Bhisham Sahni in his work 'We have arrived in Amritsar' and Krishna Chander's 'Peshawar Express' have also used trains as a symbol of fragility and impermanency of life to reach the desired destination, however each one of them have interpreted in their unique way to express the idea. The train in the novel by Khushwant Singh gains the status of a reporter that carries the burden of the dead bodies and transposes the horrid images of death and violence across the border lit by the fire of hatred.

The violence that erupted during Partition has been represented in a very unusual way in *Train to Pakistan*, as there is no detailed information of the journey that the refugees in that train undertook, as well as the violence that occurred in the train for what reason is unknown, and one can only witness the end result of the violence that arrived in the village of Mano Majra in the form of dead bodies.

The train therefore has a different symbolic significance in the novel by Khushwant Singh in terms of interpretation as compared to other authors as it runs from Mano Majra to other places and so the life of people living in that village is interconnected with other places and outer world. And so a disruption in the railway services and schedule after the violent chapter of Partition leads as a symbol of social chaos, confusion and disruption in the normal flow of life. The idea is much clarified in the novel as under:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the mullah's call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be hungry, and clamored for food all the time. In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by – if it did come by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether, so

there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra.22 (Singh 1956; 1988: 91-92)

Mano Majra happens to be a remote sleepy small village on the frontier line of India and Pakistan where the Hindus and Muslims have been living in serenity despite their cultural differences that they had never noticed till the flames of partition reached their village and each and every person suddenly becomes aware of their second identity as a Hindu or Muslim, leaving the first identity of being a human. The village is stirred by the horror of partition that made both the communities forget their feelings of brotherhood and trust upon each other and one community eye the other as a rival. The issue of partition was made naked with the realistic narrative of Singh which was immensely gripping and engrossing the readers in that time period. The style of his narration is impersonal to the extreme levels of coldness and in presenting the blood thirsty images of the partition.

Being the first partition novel that got published in the year 1956, the novel has attained an iconic status where the critics across the countries have appreciated the pitiless realism of the text to portray that how much humanity can degrade itself for the sake of stereotypes on caste and class discrimination and at the same time Singh does not forget to show humanity over hatred at the end of the text through the character of Jugga. The idea of juxtaposing both human and inhuman behaviour has been quite a complex job that has been hardly executed by other authors narrating the same subject of partition. The greatness of the novel lies in Singh's idea of raising himself above parochialism. Singh deeply investigates the idea to conclude, that the idea of partition was a demand by Muhammad Ali Jinnah that he forced upon during the British rule in India, Therefore the British cannot be directly blamed for the partition and in fact it was a kind of constitutional tussle for getting the greater representational power in the government to be formed after Independence. Unfortunately, innocent people on both sides were victimized as a result of this partition theory.



The beautiful description of Mano Majra and its harmony in the beginning reflects a kind of prelude towards the nightmare and foreshadows the plight likely to happen in the life of the villagers. Soon after some time there are violent episodes in succession and certain unprecedented events that follow in the summer of 1947 disturbing the harmony of the village and making the people helpless. Bhai Meet Singh appropriately sums up the idea of what will be happening to the villagers and what end they are going to meet while he updates Iqbal about the recent events at Mano Majra:

What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated, and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. (pp. 191-192)

The major event taking place in the novel is the eviction of Muslims from Mano Majra that has been their own village and their *karmabhoomi*. The scene is highly pathetic when Imam Bakhsh comes to the Sikh assembly and inquires their verdict on the sudden decision of the local administration for asking the Muslim community to evacuate the village. The event was no less than a holocaust, but he is disappointed and reassured at the same time as he says:

"Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like... But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do? (p. 147)

The Chacha accepts his misfortune with a heavy heart but is unable to manage the emotions of his daughter Nooran for whom the village is the birthplace and she has great emotional attachment with it. She is adamant on the idea of staying in the village till the Chacha warns her that if she does not leave the village, she will be literally "thrown out". This was the actual picture of what was happening in Mano Majra. The innocence of the villagers is highlighted

here who just become puppets in the hands of selfish politics and border division theory. They are the common people who love to stay in free spaces with mutual trust, love and harmony but it is the politics that divides them. As Lambardar talks to Iqbal he says:

"Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes? 24 [And then goes on to reply himself] No... Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians – or the Pakistanis. (p. 62)

The writings of Khushwant Singh are well known for trenchant secularism, humour, sarcasm and his boundless love for poetic expressions. The emotional scenes are extremely touching that to generate a sense of awareness regarding human actions and its consequences. Not only his novels but his articles that were counted as the non-fictional works also display his straight forward thinking and ultra-straight forward attitude against the communal powers that divide the country. It seems as if through his pen he wages a war against the elements of communal forces and emerges as a true icon of secularism in a society sensitized by communal warfare.

Like almost all Indian writers, Khushwant Singh has considered national movement and partition as an important theme in all his works where he discusses about the emergence, survival history and decay of many civilizations and dynasties to reflect the impermanency of the world. The event is clearly investigated by him in his novel *Train to Pakistan* in which he has presented partition with the unity of time, place and action. The village of Mano Majra plays a crucial role in this respect and helps him to closely interweave all the incidents, themes and concerns so well in the novel. He finely blends love and human compassion concentrating basically on the themes of love, equality, peace and harmony. In the novel he reflects how communal violence and bloody retaliation occurred all over the country during the partition through the scenes of terror in the village Manomajra which was once known for its harmony, peace and brotherhood between



Hindus and Muslims. The agents of spoiling peace are none other than fundamental agents joining hands with government machinery. Khushwant Singh reflects:

“By Summer of 1947, when the creation of new State of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people - Muslims, Hindus, and Sikh’s were in flight...The only remaining cases of places were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One, the village was Manomajra.”¹
(TP, pp.1-2)

Khushwant Singh, in the novel highlight two nation theory which is an idea of religious nationalism that significantly influenced the Indian subcontinent from the time British left India till the post independence times. According to the theory, Indian Muslims and Hindus are two separate sets with their own customs, religion and traditions. The two nation theory was advocated by the All Indian Muslim League which was the founding principle of the Pakistan movement, during the partition of India in 1947.

However the opposition against the two nation theory came from both nationalist Muslims and Hindus, which was based on two concepts. The first one was the concept of single Indian Nation in which Hindus and Muslims are two intertwined communities. The second reason says that Indians are not one nation, rather India is a homogeneous provincial unit which is a true nation deserving sovereignty. This view was presented by Baloch, Sindhi, Bengali and Pashtun. India officially rejects the two nation theory and has chosen to be a secular state by giving place to the concepts of religious pluralism and composite nationalism in its constitution.

The aspect of marginalization with respect to dual victimization of woman has been represented through women or feminine characters in the novel. It portrays their status and position in the society of those times inflicted by the hardships of colonization and partition of the country, Women were raped, sexually abused and killed every day. The curse of partition gave way to the exploitation and brutal killing of the marginal which included

women and innocent children, who were cruelly abducted and raped due to religious discrimination.

The novel represents how women faced rejection and suppression in post colonial India. The colonial rule created a love for white skin among men in the novel Juggat Singh, a peasant, loves a fair Muslim girl from weaver’s family.

“He has great love for his physical activities even in the problematic situation and manages to cheat her father least bothered about the looting and firing of Ram Lal he only seeks his pleasure”.

In the climax the sacrifice of life is for the lover and the child in her womb. It is displayed as under:-

“That is all you want. And you get it you are just a peasant. Always wanting to sow your seed. Even if the world were going to hell you would want to do that. Even when guns are being fired in the village wouldn’t you?” (15, ATTP)

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* reflects humanity beyond the borders of geographical segregation. Post independent India has suffered several political, religious and ethnical forces trying to bifurcate the nation in the name of separate state like Khalistan and Dravidian country: entirely overlooking and for getting the consequences of the bloodiest upheavals caused after partition of India in 1947 as India and Pakistan, two different nations. A Train to Pakistan is a realistic account of socio – political and communal hatred evoked in the heart of common people due to the geographical boundaries. The deep hatred resulted in killing, butchering of about a million people during the migration process. As Singh himself mentions:

Since human beings are an integral part of the nature so there is always a close and integral bond between them. In Khushwant Singh’s fictional village of Mano Majra both nature and human life are in right order. The mail train acts as a morning alarm for the village as it arrives the whole village gets up, the mullah at the mosque start the prayer, the Sikh priest chants his songs before the devotees children take care of cattle’s and the life begins with a new day for the villagers. It was the same cyclic rhythm



going on everyday and as Singh regards "it has always been so, until the summer of 1947." (Singh 6). The partition of India in the year 1947 changed the entire perspective of a free nation that people dreamt before Independence. The constitution of the country was framed in the year 1950 which was an end product of two cultures continually in conflict with each other. First was the one that reflected the interests of the leaders to envision India as a country with multicultural dimensions which was eventually shaped due to its unique history and geographical setup and the other was the one that left the first concern totally unattended and was much concerned about issues related to unity, security and administrative efficiency of the country.

The first concern led to the framing of an administrative structure that incorporated the secular and federal aspects in the democracy to be introduced in the constitution of India in the year 1950 but the second rule led to the development of a governing and administrative machinery that comprised of all those elements that consolidated the British rule in India. This resulted in the emergence of India not as a democracy in a true sense but as a semi hegemonic state that had drawn most of its idealisms from the Government of India Act of 1935.

According to W H Morris- Jones, it was a legacy that belonged to their immediate past and had derived its experiences from the nationalist movements. In the initial years, after achieving independence the politics of India drew its

theories from the above two legacies and the nationalist policy persisted as the driving forces of India's future in the coming days.

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* is a dynamic novel as the title itself implies dynamism, movement and instability which is parallel to the novel's theme. The term train and the train itself becomes an agent of partition, horror and major displacement, The train therefore signifies the idea of displacement and replacement from one place to another, referring specifically to the displacement of people on either sides of the boundary.

Partition was a major event in the history of India which touched the life of every common man who lost and suffered a lot during those times. Not only it caused material loss but also mass killing and massacres based on the idea of religious division and hatred stirred the entire nation immediately after independence. The Akhand Bharat, of which people dreamt after independence was completely shattered.

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